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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted using R. W. Mack and R. C. Snyder's properties of conflict systems as the basis for an analysis of the gay civil rights movement and comparing that movement to the movement for black civil rights. The analysis revealed that both movements served to facilitate personal identity through group solidarity; however, the gay rights movement was clearly distinct in that it represented a conflict that was predominately a value or ideological conflict. Violence as a mode of conflict resolution was projected as one of the possible outcomes of the gay rights movement. (Author/FL)

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GAY LIBERATION AS IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

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GAY LIBERATION AS IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

While all conflict between powerful and powerless groups have economic implications, if not an actual economic base, the conflict over gay rights is also grounded in ideological differences. At issue are basic value differences (Aubert, 1963) or a clash of "conceptions of the desirable" (Coleman, 1956; K[illegible]ckhohn, 1951). Thus, the dynamics of the gay rights movement may be comparable to the power struggles reflected in the Crusades of the Christians against the Moslems during the Middle Ages, the torturing and burning of witches in the 15th to 18th centuries, the crusades of Catholics against Protestants after the Reformation, the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, or the genocide of Tibetan Buddhists by the Chinese in the 1960's.

In his 1966 Kurt Lewin Memorial Award Address, Daniel Katz pointed out that social psycholigists had too long neglected the study of such social movements and conflict between groups. He then examined the civil rights movement and the protest against the war in Vietnam as examples of the relevance of social structure and system forces for an understanding of social phenomena. Among the similarities Katz identified in those two movements was that both had the advantage that the values which justified their thrust are part of the value system of the larger society.

In the United States, the present controversy over gay rights is perhaps equivalent in intensity of the civil rights movement and the protest against the war in Vietnam. Comparing the gay civil

rights movement as one of ideological or value conflict to other American social movements may help us understand the present political climate regarding gays and project alternatives.

Recent History

On June 27, 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street, and gays fought back--a symbolic moment for the current gay civil rights movement. This event has been commemorated each year since with parades and political demonstrations in many cities across the country.

Data collected by the Institute for Sex Research (Levitt and Klassen, 1974) indicated that most (84%) respondents believed that "homosexuality is a social corruption that can cause the downfall of a civilization." Three-quarters of the respondents would deny to a homosexual the right to be a minister, a school teacher, or a judge, and two-thirds would bar the homosexual from medical practice or government service. A new report from the Institute due this year will indicate that Americans continue to disapprove violently of homosexuality (Barbour, 1978). Again, while being willing to tolerate homosexuals as musicians, actors, florists, and interior decorators, respondents would prohibit homosexuals as judges, public officials, police officers, physicians, or teachers.

Similarly, other survey data (Gallup, 1977a) show that, while the majority of Americans (56%) believe that homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities, such rights would not apply to certain sensitive positions: 65% would deny a homosexual the right to be an elementary school teacher, 54% the clergy,

44% a doctor, and 38% the armed forces. Less than half (43%) felt that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal; only 14% felt that homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children (Gallup, 1977b).

In a much debated vote in 1974, the American Psychiatric Association decided that homosexuality per se would no longer be defined as a mental disorder. That action was followed in 1975 by a similar statement from the American Psychological Association. Yet, preliminary results of a recent survey of 10,000 American Psychiatric Association members by the journal Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality as reported in the Time magazine article "Sick Again?" indicates that 69% believed that "homosexuality is usually a pathological adaptation, as opposed to a normal variation" and 43% believed that homosexuals are generally a greater risk than heterosexuals in positions of great responsibility.

The United States Supreme Court ruled in 1967 that homosexual aliens could be deported as "persons afflicted with a psychopathic personality." Since then the Court has not considered a case concerning homosexual rights. In May, 1978, the Court refused to review a decision upholding the constitutionality of a North Carolina law prohibiting homosexual acts between consenting adults, thus continuing the noninvolvement policy reflected in its refusal to rule on the legality of Virginia's sodomy laws. The effect is to permit individual states to use sodomy laws for prosecuting consenting adults for private homosexual acts. In the Fall of 1977, the Supreme Court also refused to rule on a case involving the

dismissal of a gay teacher, James Gaylord, from a Washington school district. In declining to rule on the right of a gay group to be recognized as an official campus organization at the University of Missouri, the effect of the Court's silence was supportive of gays for the first time.

On a local level, at least thirty-seven municipalities have homosexual rights ordinances, and it is here that the conflict is currently being waged. Human rights ordinances gained national attention in June, 1977, when a "Save Our Children" campaign, led by singer Anita Bryant, resulted in the repeal of such an ordinance in Dade County, Florida (which includes Miami). The day after the 202,319 to 89,562 vote, Governor Askew signed laws barring homosexuals from marrying members of the same sex or adopting children. Then in April, 1978, voters in St. Paul, Minnesota, voted to repeal a four-year-old provision that banned discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations on grounds of sexual and affectional preference. In May, 1978, Wichita, Kansas, repealed a similar seven-month-old human rights ordinance, and two weeks later, Eugene, Oregon, followed suit.

In California, Republican state senator John Briggs from Fullerton, Orange County, filed an initiative for the November, 1978 state election that would have let school districts fire, or refuse to hire, teachers, teachers' aides, administrators, or counselors for "advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging or promoting private or public sexual acts . . . between persons of the same sex in a manner likely to come to the attention of other employees or students . . . ." Publicly or indiscreetly engaging

in the same acts, or presenting them as a viable lifestyle, would also be grounds for dismissal. An early poll showed 49 to 59% of California voters in favor of the initiative (DeVries, 1978). In the opinion of pollster Mervyn Field, it was only after public statements of opposition from President Jimmy Carter; former California governor Ronald Reagan; the governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction of California; state AFL-CIO; and most teacher's organizations did California voters turn down the initiative by 3,915,415 (58%) to 2,786,171 vote. Briggs promised another anti-homosexual initiative on the 1980 ballot.

Gay Liberation as Social Conflict

Mack and Snyder's (1957) analysis of social conflict suggests seven properties of conflict systems: parties, issues, power relations, institutionalization, mediation, system boundaries and limitations, and modes of resolution. These are used here as categories for an analytical discussion of the gay civil rights movement in order to permit a legitimate comparison to other American social movements and projections about possible outcomes of the gay civil rights movement.

Parties

One of the preconditions of a conflict relationship is the visibility of parties to each other. In 1948, Dr. Alfred Kinsey published research showing that two out of every five American males had engaged in a homosexual act, while at least one-tenth

of the country's population could be considered homosexual. Yet, this one-tenth of the country's population has not yet identified itself as a group with the same intensity that American blacks did. The major difference between the black civil rights movement and the gay civil rights movement is that the majority of gays are invisible to society at large and, indeed, to one another.

While conflicts do not necessarily presuppose established and coherent groups (Kahn-Freund, 1954), a party to a conflict may be created by the search for an "enemy" if that identification results in conflictful interaction. The "Save Our Children" campaign and responses to it may serve to facilitate increasing numbers of homosexuals publicly identifying themselves with the gay community. Indeed, at this time and from this logic, the weakening of the "Save Our Children" campaign beyond a certain point would be a distinct advantage to the gay civil rights movement in that the campaign is serving to create public and formal gay civil rights groups through which invisible homosexuals can become visible gays.

A well-known relationship between party size and conflict has been observed in the case of interracial conflict. In general, as a minority group increases in size, conflict arises or is intensified. Mack and Snyder (1957) suggest a 60-40 ratio as prerequisite for high intensity confrontation. It would appear impossible for gays to obtain that group size without forming coalitions with non-gays sympathetic to gay civil rights. One effect of increasing numbers can be predicted from conflict theory: The earlier gay movement involved the total commitment of a small number of uncompromising

individuals; however, with more people identifying themselves as gay and with political coalitions being formed, the common denominator of group goals will lower.

Will increasing numbers mean more separate, formal groups? In San Francisco alone, one can find some thirty or more gay political organizations. On the basis of social conflict theory, one would hypothesize that, as the conflict continues, effective power will centralize in a much smaller number of organizations as the current large number of organizations diffuses hostility and antagonism. This will, in turn, affect the nature of the conflict itself. The Stonewall Riot represented disorganized conflict characterized by instability and inconclusiveness. The increasing institutionalization of the gay civil rights movement would be expected to result in continuity of interaction and regularized rules and expectations and, ironically, a vested interest in each other's strength in order to justify continued efforts (Kahn-Freund, 1954).

Finally, extraparty factors in the gay civil rights movement are a limiting factor on increasing numbers of homosexuals identifying themselves as gay. As was noted earlier, most gays are invisible to their friends and co-workers. Thus, cross-pressures are at work on each gay individual who is well-integrated into society at large not to participate fully or publicly in the movement.

Issues

The issues involved in gay rights conflicts revolve around values and, as such, may represent a basic cleavage. One basic value at issue is a generalized, cultural belief system regarding

appropriate roles for each sex, i.e. the maintenance of traditional masculine and feminine sex roles and with the need to preserve double standards between the sexes as in the traditional family ideology of dominant father and submissive mother (Morin and Garfinkle, 1978). Conflicts of value keep antagonists apart. For example, it is becoming increasingly impossible to be openly gay at a Southern Baptist Convention or a born-again Christian on Castro Street in San Francisco. The parties in value conflict often move away from each other because people tend to associate with others of similar value structure (Rokeach, 1967). Thus, as ideological conflict, the gay civil rights movement is likely to be intense as one side views the other as an "infidel" and requires "conversion" to be saved. For example, Ms. Bryant is reported to be planning a series of ranch and farm counseling and therapy centers designed to change homosexuals' lifestyles. Bryant defines the gay issue, not in terms of lifestyle or human rights, but in terms of morality. In California, Briggs put together a coalition of more than 300 of the state's fundamentalist churches, while Roman Catholic Archbishop John Quinn, Episcopalian priests, and Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform rabbis spoke out against the initiative.

Resolution of ideological conflict is dependent on compromising or accommodating the opposing values within the framework of "higher values." However, ideological conflict is often characterized by the fact that a basic value of one party (e.g., not sinning) requires the absolute denial of a basic value of the other party (e.g., being able to express one's emotional and sexual affection to another

of the same sex). Insights about religious conflict (Williams, 1956), extended to the gay civil rights movement, suggest that, as the claim of anti-gay groups to regulate gays' values is inclusive and broad, the less susceptible is this conflict to some form of resolution. Coser (1956) asserts that ideological conflict is more intense and the parties thereto more uncompromising because of objectification of issues and lack of inhibitions on personal attacks.

Power Relations

Mack and Snyder (1957) define the power relations component of any conflict system as the respective bases of effective influence on which the parties can operate and the allocation of control over decisions which occur during the interaction. In its stage of multiple organizations, the gay civil rights movement is diffuse and instable; that is, it offers a broad range of effective bases of influence and ambiguity of control over decisions. A smaller number of gay civil rights organizations would result in centralized interaction and formal allocation of decision-making power.

An unstable power relationship makes measuring the actual power balance difficult in advance of concrete tests. Gay leaders have been notoriously inaccurate in predicting the actual outcomes of local voting. If these local referenda are taken as accurate concrete tests of the power balance, then it is clear that the gay civil rights movement is operating from a low power position.

If the gay civil rights movement remains disorganized, characterized by diffuse and unstable power relations, the possibility of employing harassment techniques is high. Deutsch (1969) has defined harassment

as the only effective strategy available to a low power group when it faces an indifferent or hostile high power group. Harassment employs legal or semilegal techniques to inflict a loss, to interfere with, disrupt or embarrass those with high power. Massive retaliation and repression when directed against harassment techniques seem inappropriate and arouse sympathy. Forms of harassment techniques used by low power groups include consumer boycotts; work slowdowns; rent strikes; demonstrations; sit-ins; tying up phones, mail, government offices, businesses, traffic, etc. by excessive and prolonged usage; ensnarling bureaucratic systems in their own red tape by requiring them to follow their own formally stated rules and procedures; being excessively friendly and cooperative; creating psychological nuisances by producing outlandish behavior, appearances, and odors in stores, offices and other public places; encouraging contagion of the ills of the slum (rats, uncollected garbage, etc.) to surrounding communities; etc. Harassment techniques, of course, are most effective when they are employed for well-defined objectives and focused on key persons and key institutions rather than when they occur as haphazard expressions of individual discontent.

Institutionalization

Institutionalization of conflict generally means continuity of interaction; regularized procedures for handling changes in conditions, goals, and power; interdependence of parties; and the creation of new norms (Kahn-Freund, 1954). Thus, institutionalized conflict implies a large degree of cooperation between the parties.

The gay civil rights movement being non-institutionalized and characterized by diffuse and unstable power relations would, therefore, be marked by chronic recurrence of unsettled issues, by an absence of agreed procedures for review of relations, and by discontinuity of interaction or drastic shifts in the mode of resolution. Mack and Snyder (1957) hypothesize a persistent tendency toward institutionalization of social conflict as the growth of collective bargaining in the United States demonstrates. It is difficult to imagine, however, such a tendency operating in cases of broad and inclusive ideological conflict such as represented by the gay civil rights movement.

Mediation

This aspect of conflict systems is closely bound up with the previous dimension. Highly institutionalized conflict systems (such as contemporary labor-management conflict in the United States) are more likely to be mediated representational systems, while the gay civil rights movement is more likely to be a direct, unmediated system. The gay civil rights movement, as would be predicted of broad and inclusive ideological conflict, is unlikely to produce bargaining representatives or to recognize the legitimacy of mediating agencies--if indeed any are available.

System Boundaries and Limitations

Social conflict affects, and in turn is affected by, a surrounding environment. In a complex industrial urban society, social conflict tends to be carried on by highly organized groups having

diverse membership and specialized representatives and negotiators. While the gay civil rights movement may become more broadly based and more highly organized with specialized representatives, it is unlikely to develop mediation specialists.

One boundary of the gay civil rights movement as a social conflict system is marked by disinterested or neutral outsiders to the conflict. Expanding the conflict by public referenda decreases the number of disinterested or neutral outsiders, thus making solutions difficult.

In the case of the gay civil rights movement, there appear on the surface to be few system limitations on the intensity of the conflict: financial and other costs of sustained conflict and inertia or that one or both parties simply run out of sustained drive.

Modes of Resolution

Some modes of resolution are appropriate for some conflict systems and others are not; that is, modes of resolution are fundamentally related to the nature of conflict (Mack and Snyder, 1957). One inappropriate mode for the gay civil rights movement is public referendum. The public referenda to date have been preceded by extensive public debate, thus hardening views into simple bipolar opposites. Such a mode of resolution is inappropriate for any minority movement. Public referenda do not legislate in the interests of minorities, as the majority seldom vote to empower the minority.

Two other possible modes of resolution are the courts and

public education or advocacy. Roger Baldwin, for example, the person officially designated as the founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, has stated that the only way to protect gay rights is through the courts (Goldberg, 1976). Perhaps the most successful organization using education and advocacy is the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) formed five years after the Stonewall Riot. For example, in 1978 NGTF was able to begin meeting with White House aides and heads of federal agencies on a number of gay rights issues. As a result, the Civil Service is now open to gays, and the U.S. Public Health Service has reversed its anti-gay position so that gays are now able to enter the country as immigrants. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has now agreed to give attention to the special needs of gay inmates. Work with the Federal Communications Commission and national networks has resulted in more positive gay programming. In addition, NGTF has continued to solicit and publish non-discrimination statements from national organizations and corporations.

The interrelationships among the preceding six properties of conflict systems do suggest a hypothesis concerning the mode of resolution of conflict over gay civil rights: as multiple parties now exist, as the issue is one of ideology, as power relations are diffuse and unstable, as the conflict is non-institutionalized, as the conflict is direct and immediate, and as limitations are minimal, there exists a definite tendency toward a violent mode of resolution except for the limitations noted below.

Pressures toward violence in racial conflict have been

identified (Dahlke, 1952): (a) the period is one of change and mibility, (b) the minority group has an outstanding trait or characteristic which can become a basis for negative assessments, (c) lawful authorities assign the minority group a subordinate status, (d) one or more major associations or organizations direct the attack against the minority, (e) the press and other media have been minority-baiting, and (f) suitable personnel (students and marginal workers) are available for initiating action. Several of these conditions do exist in perhaps a half a dozen of the country's major cities in which the conflict over gay civil rights has reinforced prejudice, unfavorable stereotypes, and hostility.

There are, however, at least two powerful overriding restraints on violence: integration into society and, closely related, multiple loyalties. Conflict theory asserts the more integrated into society are the parties to conflict, the less likely will conflict be violent. As are most gays invisible, they are also well integrated into society. And, relatedly, when gays are affected by shared values which offset the values which put them in conflict with others, violence is again less likely to occur. For example, gay and straight businesspeople who share certain values and behaviors are less susceptible to ideological conflict than are gays and straights who do not share these business values and behaviors. These two overriding restraints are probably sufficient to prevent violence outside of small sections in a small number of major cities where suitable personnel are concentrated.

Functions of Ideological Conflict

Himes (1966) was prophetic in identifying four system-maintaining and system-enhancing consequences for American society of the realistic conflict produced by the black civil rights movement. The concept of realistic racial conflict postulates race relations as power relations and describes the impact of mobilizing and applying the social power which is accessible to the minority group. Himes maintained that realistic racial conflict (a) alters the social structure, (b) enhances social communication, (c) extends social solidarity, and (d) facilitates personal identity.

The alteration of social structure occurs because of a reduction in the power differential between the parties due to the conflict. The United States has clearly seen this begin to happen for blacks. It is hypothesized here, however, that this will not be the case in the gay civil rights movement. It seems unlikely that gays will be able to win enough public support or build enough coalitions to reach near numerical power parity.

Himes hypothesized that realistic racial conflict extended communication over significant issues. However, the gay civil rights movement, to date, has been mainly reactive to the issues raised by the other parties rather than proactive in bringing alternative issues or communication over possible higher values to neutral outsiders.

Regarding social solidarity, Himes suggested that conflict could act to reaffirm the ultimate values of justice, freedom, understanding, brotherhood, constitutional rights, promise of democracy, and truth around which social consensus is organized. The

blocking of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment ratification suggests that the values at issue in this and the gay civil rights movement are contrary to, or at least somewhat at variance with, society's ultimate values.

Finally, Himes hypothesized that, through racial conflict, blacks' group solidarity was enhanced, group boundaries were clarified, and individual-group linkages were strengthened. In a later analysis, Kidder and Stewart (1975) suggested that racial conflict established a group of significant others--other blacks instead of whites--who redefined many aspects of black culture and identity. The gay civil rights movement has been serving a similar function.

In conclusion, therefore, racial conflict and ideological conflict as represented by the gay civil rights movement are different in many important ways. The greatest single similarity is that the gay civil rights movement can be an important force in facilitating individual gay people's identity as gay men and women.

Projections

Based on the conflict theory presented heretofore, what future events might be reasonably anticipated? Those opposing gay civil rights on an ideological basis may set as an objective the "conversion" of gays to born-again Christian status. That hope to forever remove homosexuality from society is totally unrealistic. What is realistic and attainable is to attempt to intimidate every gay to return to the anonymity of "the closet," returning gays to past days of hidden and guilt-ridden liver. Supporters of the

Briggs' initative, for example, point out that the initiative does not bar gay teachers who remain in the closet.

How has the gay civil rights movement responded? Unfortunately the response to date has been on the opporent's terms, such as in public referenda. Referendum strategy only confirms the power inequity and could lead to harassment techniques.

How should the gay civil rights movement respond? Ms. Bryant and Sen. Briggs are the ideal external threats which can serve to produce a legitimate public gay community. That is, the optimal response to that external threat should be to facilitate every gay's coming out. One possible response to the Briggs' initiative is: "Do you want to fight the Briggs' initiative? Then tell your parents you're gay." That is exactly the response least desired by the enemy. Ms. Bryant and Sen. Briggs may not always be available. The time is now in terms of conflict theory to utilize the conflict to assist in group formation, development, and increased internal cohesion.

After more and more gays come out, the second stage would be set to reduce the numbers of potential opponents, i.e. to reduce the public's unfavorable attitudes towards homosexuals. Morin and Garfinkle's (1978) summary of the research suggests that people who hold negative attitudes toward homosexuality are more authoritarian, more dogmatic, more cognitively rigid, more intolerant of ambiguity, more status-conscious, more sexually rigid, more guilty and negative about their own sexual impulses, less accepting of others in general, and more committed to traditional sex roles. Further, they contend that such attitudes can be relatively easily

changed. Morin (1974) reported dramatic changes in attitudes after a single course on homosexuality offered to graduate and undergraduate students in psychology. More importantly, Morin and Garfinkle suggest that close personal interaction with gays of similar social status appears to be a crucial experience in altering homophobic attitudes and behavior. As more gays come out to relatives and friends, more and more neutrals and disinterested parties will come into direct contact with gays of similar status and values (other than sexual) to their own.

Finally, the time would come to neutralize the external threat--the Bryants and Briggs--by public programs which clearly have as objectives those higher values of social consensus which are accepted by the Bryants and Briggs. Thus, neutrals' evaluations of the two parties to the conflict could only conclude that the Bryants and Briggs are inconsistent to their own higher values of social consensus.

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